

New outlaws brace for onslaught aimed at fringe of society

Duncan Campbell examines the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, while Viviek Chaudhary looks at some of the activities that the bill aims to ban

'POLICE are having a hideous time in some streets, said

Lady Olga Maitland, Conservative MP for Sutton and Cheam, as she expressed her anger over the delay in the passage of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill this summer. The public has a right to expect proper action to be taken now.

Action, whether the public deem it to be or not, is due to be taken when the bill reappears in the Commons in October — after the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, confirmed in July that it would be delayed to allow a series of debates in the Lords to be reversed.

People who live on what are seen as the edges of society believe that once the bill becomes law they will indeed be in for a "hideous time".

Certain clauses are aimed at people — squatters, travellers, new-age travellers, hunt saboteurs and demonstrators whose very mention at a Tory Party conference can raise a "boo-hiss" response to a noise level that would, under the bill, constitute a new offence.

Effectively the key clauses aimed at these groups are:

Gatherings: Clauses 65, 66 empower local councils, on application by the chief constable and with the Home Secretary's permission, to ban gatherings of more than 20 people on a

police or face arrest. The number of vehicles is now reduced to six, and the trespass clause is removed so that those originally allowed on to the land legally can be removed. A request to leave can be made by a local authority even if vehicles have the landowner's permission to stay. "Damage" to property can include urinating.

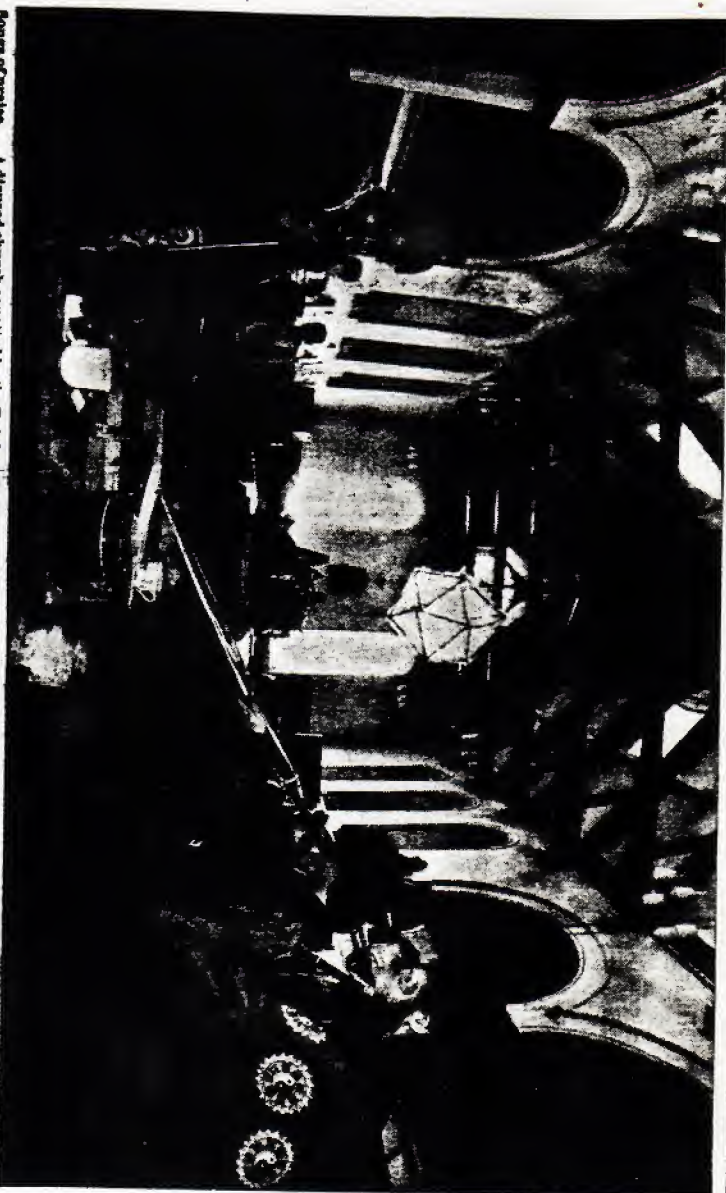
A local authority's duty to provide sites for a limited number of travellers is abolished. **Hit and run:** Clause 63 makes it an offence for a trespasser in the open air or a non-trespasser on a highway — provided it is not a surfaced road — to attempt to disrupt or obstruct an actively taking place in the open air.

Squatters: Clauses 67, 68 and 69 give additional power for anyone authorised by a property owner to make forced entry. A squatter refusing to leave immediately could face a prison sentence. **Disorderly conduct:** Clause 55 enables police officers of Liverpool, Manchester and London to arrest anyone who believes that "in or above who behaviour may lead to serious violence may take place in any locality" to authorise stop-and-searches of pedestrians and vehicles.

Resistance to the above clauses was slow to develop. Neither the main opposition parties nor the trade union movement have taken part in public campaigns against the bill.



Home is where the heart is... The Shimmers with their new home, a squatted house in north London.



Days of grace... A disused church squatted by the Rastafarian Tribe in north London offers an advice centre and 24-hour cafe.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GARETH THOMAS

The DIY culture stands united on home front

The squatters

LESS THAN two months ago it was just another empty, derelict building in inner-city London. Today, it is home to an eclectic collection of drifters, students, musicians, and eco-activists.

The squat was "busted" open (squatters' terminology for entering a building) three weeks ago. Within hours, a legal notice on the front door warned the authorities that they need a court order for eviction.

Under the criminal justice bill, the notice will be about as useful as the other sign on the front of the building in Kenilworth, north London, giving the opening times of the former Department of Health and Social Security office.

Once the bill becomes law, squatters can be evicted within 24 hours, and most of the 25-year-old

'We hope to carry on, but I despair when I think about the criminal justice bill. Where would all the people have gone if it had been in effect? There are not enough homes as it is. The bill is just going to push people on to the streets'

I'm good with my hands and have got tools, I've been doing as much work as I can..."

Christine Sherry, aged 27, a former journalist, is one of several trying to get local authority funding for the squat. The eventual aim is to try to set up artists' studios, creative facilities, and permanent accommodation for homeless people.

With a blanket wrapped around her to keep warm, she neatly-kept room, writing letters to the London borough of Camden outlining their plans. They have been told that the borough intends to evict them, but remain optimistic.

"We hope to carry on, but I despair when I think about the criminal justice bill," she said. "Where would all these people have gone if the bill had been in effect?"

"There is not enough accommodation as it is. The bill is just going to push people on to the

grasp but comfortable. The only rule, newcomers and visitors are told, is to respect peoples' individual space. The philosophy is simple — share skills, recycle everything you can, and if there are empty buildings around them go and live in them, because it is better than sleeping rough.

They call it DIY culture — using your initiative and skills to overcome the failure of the authorities in providing housing and training for thousands of people around the country.

To some outsiders the squat and those in it might be an illegal ecosystem, but to Revyn, aged 44, it is all he has that he can call home.

He said: "I feel very privileged to be here because otherwise I would be on the streets. I arrived in London two weeks ago from Lancashire with just £10 in my pocket. I found out about the squat and because

cal instruments or singing. "The centre has an open-door policy for migrants and people looking for accommodation."

"We are like social workers," said James, who lives in a caravan parked behind the church. "If the bill was in place then where would all these people go?"

Back at the squat, at night the residents assemble in the communal area, sitting on a grubby blue carpet surrounded by paintings, plants and pictures of animals, torn out of mazes, pinned to the walls. Drinking beer and smoking cigarettes, the conversation invariably turns to the bill and its one positive effect.

"It's thrown everyone together — rivers, squatters, travellers, civil rights people, hunt saboteurs. In a way it's done us all a favour and unified us so that we can fight it," said Ms Slattery.

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The Guardian

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